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THE DEGENERACY OF THE HUMAN SPECIES.*

Those who live in transitional times, and are affected by them, know how difficult it is to discover in the disorders of the present, the germinating seeds of a more perfect future. In fact the rudimentary forms of life in any shape but poorly disclose the relative perfection to which they are ultimately destined. We must not wonder then if our primitive progenitors saw models of perfection in the past and not the future, saw that they themselves were but degraded prototypes not only of a more complete, but of a fully perfect type of our race. But strange to say, though looking upon themselves as miserably drifting away from a paradisaical past, yet they were instinctively led to do homage to the future, by looking forward to a paradise not only beyond the grave, but even beyond this planet. But while these spontaneously beautiful creations of our primitive progenitors are easily intelligible to us, we are at a loss to account for the same belief in the author of the book before us. It has no proof or demonstration in the creditable history of mankind, in the outward facts of Nature, but is a pure creation of the primitive mind, inwardly working on itself, without any light from without. It is this *partial* operation of the mind, which is so fruitful in the generation of theories or beliefs, which are easily sucked in by each nascent generation, but which elude the scientific ordeal of ages as easily as shadows the trembling grasp of a child's hand. Fortunately for Dr. Morel that though the theory of his book is entirely primitive, yet the elaboration of it is purely modern and scientific, and will prove to be a most valuable and important contribution to that treasury of knowledge to which we must all have recourse if we would know our duties, and intelligently discharge them.

Whether the thousand millions of inhabitants now on the planet are traceable to a homogeneous couple, or to a plurality of races, varying in their physical, intellectual, and moral qualities, is not a question of much importance to him who looks upon the future as the goal of relative perfection for man, and not the past. All ethnological, national, and religious distinctions are, and have been rather nominal than real, relatively to man as a being capable of being elevated or degraded by causes foreign to his control. Until the good or evil influences on man of climate, of intoxication, of famine, of society, of labor, of vocation, of inherited good or bad qualities, of the abuse of different narcotics and of education, are fully explained and understood, we should avoid being deceived by artificial classifications of men according to their race, religion, and nation. All these terms so far forth as they have any real significance in the natural order of things, are better suited to simulate ignorance, than to disclose knowledge, are pretexts for fraudulent invasions, and for political

ambition and knavery, and serve to stimulate and promote individual rather than general interests.

The extension of the industrial and commercial spirit has sunk man in the consideration of his manual works, has led to an idolatry of that which he materially projects out of himself, and to a neglect of the cultivation of that spirit of humanity which should be so carefully perpetuated from generation to generation. In thus taking note of the noisy streams, and overlooking their silent source, man has been seriously wounded both in his foetal and subsequent life, and diseases have been generated and transmitted until, as the author of this work says, he has heard medical men everywhere complain of the increasing number of cases of mental derangement, paralysis, epilepsy, hysteria, hypochondria, suicide, and the general enfeeblement of the intellectual and physical powers. Imbecility and idiocy locked up in worldly cunning and selfishness on the one hand, and obtruding brutality hardened into impudence on the other, are the two poles between which most of men oscillate, in consequence of their diseased deviation from anything like a true type of manhood.

We shall give, in Dr. Morel's own words, the plan of his work :

"*Modes de production des êtres dégénérés, classification, prophylaxie, hygiène et traitement, sont les termes sur lesquels vont se concentrer toutes mes recherches.*"

The consideration of the foregoing points under their respective heads, forms, as it were, the dogmatic part of the work, wherein Dr. Morel shows much soundness of judgment, and great scientific familiarity with the subject-matter of his labors.

He then proceeds to treat of the degenerating agents to which man is subject, both individually and collectively, connecting therewith the history of these agents as they are to be found among the different peoples of the globe in their present and past social conditions. It would seem that intoxicating liquids are and have been destructively prevalent amongst the Chinese, Arabs, etc., leading to frightful physical degradation, and to the complete perversion both of the mind and heart. These evils are nursed by one generation most ignominiously, that they may be venomously transmitted to the following, thus retarding the natural progress of humanity. Before the end of the thirteenth century the Chinese were strangers to the distillation of alcoholic drinks. In the eleventh century the Arabs discovered the mode of producing them, and gave them the name (alcohol) now become so vulgarized. First confined to the pharmacy, they soon grew into general use, and in the sixteenth century they were regarded not only as an universal panacea, but as a preservative against all evils. Physicians grew lyrically mad in singing their praises, and holding them up to the admiration of the young and the old. In the middle of the seventeenth century they became ordinary beverages, and took their place in the cottage as well as the palace, and became, as now, the most stimulating of all drinks, and

* *Traité des Dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives. Par le Docteur B. A. Morel. Paris: 1857.*

the source of the most disgraceful disorders. Intoxication amongst the ancient Greeks and Romans, as described by Hippocrates and Seneca, leaves no doubt as to its being an inherent defect in mankind, and but very slowly eradicable. It is a disease that manifests itself in a variety of ways, and through the medium of innumerable agents. Yet we are firm in the faith of man's ultimate ability to morally elevate himself above the low appetites which crave for stimulants, and to assert his claim to that spiritual prerogative, which has to be purchased by his slow moral progression through long and laborious ages. The whole of Dr. Morel's chapter on intoxicating drinks is masterly and instructive, and should be carefully and conscientiously read by every member of our community. Opium, tobacco, and other narcotic substitutes for spirituous drinks, as they prevail amongst the Orientals, are, also, carefully considered by Dr. Morel, and their degenerating influences on the human organism most clearly pointed out. The great question of the day is as to what means we should resort in order to kill the desire in man for stimulating drinks. We see this desire manifesting itself among the rich as well as the poor, among the instructed as well as the ignorant, and among those in the highest social condition as well as the lowest. Those interested in this matter cannot do better than consult the pages of Dr. Morel's work.

Dr. Morel regards the degenerated state of man as a deviation from the primitive or normal type of humanity, without being able to state satisfactorily what this primitive type was, or where it existed: and his inability in this respect is due to the defective theory upon which his labor is based. The normal condition of man, as well as his moral and intellectual unity, is to be looked forward to as a thing of the Future and not the Past: and all ethnological investigations that are not prosecuted from this point of view, all inquiries into the causes of man's degeneration, as well as into his growing recuperative moral energies, must be partial and defective, unless this principle is kept constantly in view. Man is gradually overcoming the pernicious influences of climate, of defective manners, of deficient or injurious food, and of misdirected education. All invidious distinctions as to race are due to ignorance of all the inward and outward agencies that modify and change the character of men. When man's place in the true hierarchy of all created things shall become scientifically established and understood, when vital harmony is established between his naturally legitimate aptitudes and their respective points of destination, the inequalities of social conditions and happiness will be easily measured, if not wholly effaced.

We cannot better close our notice of this work than by giving the following couple of translated extracts from it:

"The function which each individual is called on to discharge in the order of humanity is truly useful only in so far forth as he practises the moral law; and the upholders

of this law, those who are charged with the application of it, are not only moralists, clergymen, magistrates, the instructors of youth, and physicians, but the fathers of families, and the individuals whereof the families are composed."

"I teach nothing new to physicians in telling them that physical hygiene is the inseparable companion of moral hygiene; but there are moralists who require to be convinced that the moral law is destined to full maturity only in a *sound organism*."

"On the other hand, the theory of some modern economists who base the moral amelioration of the masses solely on the elements of material prosperity, is, perhaps, not less dangerously objectionable. Material prosperity, pushed to its highest degree, may become, under many circumstances, a condition highly perilous. The future of coming generations would be essentially compromised, if one should persist in seeking the solution of the problem of social amelioration solely in material prosperity; and if one had no other formula for regenerating the masses than that of offering them in perspective the enjoyment of riches, and of developing among them an appetite for material pleasures."

TO CHRISTIE.

"The noblest color has ever something sad in it."—*John Ruskin*.

MAIDEN, when souls like thine are sent
To bear the griefs of saddened years—
When Beauty all her glow has lent
To faces destined but for tears;
And when we see that sadness gives
The holiest light the brow can wear,
While joy fills up our duller lives,
Yet leaves no heavenly brightness there;—
How can we fail to learn that He,
The Artist whose best work thou wert,
Makes all His saddest tones to be
The harmonies of His best Art!

W. J. STILLMAN.

FROST FANCIES.

THE Frost's at work on the pane to-night,
Tracing his fancies, the artist-sprite!
His fancies, so exquisite, dainty, and rare,
They might be the dreams of the sleeping air
Crystallized—showing what summer things
She loves to fan with her faithful wings,
Leaves, and mosses, and vines, and flowers,
Tangled in wild-wood or trained in bowers;
With drifts of sea-weed, and dashes of spray,
All mixed, in a dream's fantastical way,
With plumes of feathery ferns, and bells
That chime, in odors, through forest-dells;
And hunting-horns, from whose silver throats
In flower-like forms wind the frozen notes—
And see, up there—how like angel-wings!—
All these, and more, are the wonderful things
Which the frolicsome Frost—the artist-sprite—
On my window traces, this wintry night.

ANNA MARY FREEMAN.